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Introducing FOCUS North America

Rev. Joshua Mosher

His Beatitude, Metropolitan JONAH, shortly after being elected, stated: "One of the things that's convicted me, very much, is where are the Orthodox hospitals? Where are the Orthodox schools? Where are the Orthodox institutions of charity? It's a beautiful thing, a beautiful thing, to build a medical clinic in a remote village in Ethiopia, but it's also a beautiful thing to build a medical clinic in a remote village in Kansas." Orthodox Christianity is known in North America for the beauty of its worship, but not for the boldness of its charitable works. FOCUS North America, the Fellowship of Orthodox Christians United to Serve, was established this year to provide

a continent-wide, pan-Orthodox avenue for this kind of social action. Word of FOCUS North America has been spreading for months, but people remain uncertain of what it is and whether to support it. Such questions came up at the Diocesan Assembly in October, and His Grace, Bishop NIKON responded to a common desire to know more by directing the ONE to investigate further and share the results with the Diocese of New England.

Some facts are quite easy to establish about the soundness of FOCUS North America. It has received over \$600,000 in pledges from both private foundations and individuals to

*FOCUS to 7**Reflections on the 46th Diocesan Assembly*

Matilde Hungerford

As a new member of the Orthodox Church, I was unsure of myself when asked to attend the Diocesan Assembly in October, and then to write a report for ONE. I did not know quite how to talk about the assembly in some way that was not a dry report. However Bishop NIKON's report to the diocese provided a framework for this article. Although it was optimistic about much of what is happening within the national church, particularly with the successful overcoming of much of the anger and frustration of the last few years, towards the



His Grace, Bishop NIKON presides at the opening service of the Assembly.

Photo: John Barone

end, the Bishop commented on the state of membership in the Diocese of New England:

Assembly to 4

Matilde Hungerford was the lay delegate from Christ the Savior Church, Southbury CT.

FORCC: Youth Talent Show

Nina Kosowsky



Above: Participants in the **FORCC Talent Show**.
Photo: Eva Vaniotis.

The Fellowship of Orthodox Churches of Connecticut (FORCC) every year sponsors a Talent Show for the youngsters. This year the participant Orthodox Churches were Holy Trinity in Bridgeport, Holy Transfiguration in New Haven and St. Dimitri in Easton for the purpose of uniting the Orthodox youth to-

gether to give a presentation of their talent. It was held at Holy Trinity Church in Bridgeport under the direction of Matushka Lydia Westerberg and Eva Vaniotis, and the turnout was a huge success.

The youth performed in the Aegean Room of Holy Trinity with parents, grandparents and friends who attended to admire their youngsters. The Junior Choir of Holy Trinity joined in with a beautiful song "All Good Gifts" directed by Joanna Bogardus. The performances of the Talent Show consisted of choral, piano, guitar, skit and dancing.

The pictured children in alphabetical order: Dan Antoniu, Rose Bogardus, Voletta Griffin, Katerina Karatsos, Cella Cove, Victor Korman, Andrew Korman, Savoula Koutroulas,

Andriana Ocrain, Christopher Ocrain, Darwin Pappas, Zacharias Pappas, Anna Sandalidis, Evangelia Sandalidis, Jordan Stamboulidis, Katerina Stamboulidis, Johnna Vereb, Kristina Yarovinsky and Veronica Yarovinsky,

Gifts of Holiness

Rev. William DuBovik

We have entered a special time of the year as we move toward the Nativity of Christ, or Christmas. It is a time of preparation in many ways. While there is much that can be criticized about the secularization of this great Feast Day, even a secularized world cannot hide the reality of this time of year.

Trees, lights, garland, snowmen, Santas, are all used in the secularized world, and yet all point to a happening that was Holy—the Incarnation of God in the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Many times in history Christians have come upon societies in which God was alien to the population. And many times Christians in-

fused those societies with Christian ideas and ideals. From the earliest records of the Bible, we see that the Chosen Jewish people turned from the worship of golden images and pagan symbols, and embraced the one true God, Yahweh.

And later, a Jewish teacher, our Lord, would come and through his teachings, the Gentiles of those times would be converted from false gods and rituals, and embrace the Lord as the Son of God, as would many of the then Jewish faith.

Today is very similar, as Christians encounter many non-believers. We are not called to conquer them with swords, but to offer them

Three Saints Church, Ansonia CT

Barbara Ann Dixon



Above and right: scenes from His Grace, **Bishop NIKON's visit to Three Saints Church**, where two were blessed to serve as readers. *Photos: Alexandra Mastej.* **Below: Seminarian Andrew Boyd** of St. Alexis Church, with his parents, Fr. Steven Voytovich, and Pat Wheeler, representing the Sivulka family (which had contributed scholarship money). *Photo: Vinny Melesko.*

On September 20, we welcomed a special, honored guest from Belarus: Sister Vera Puscheva (Sisters of Mercy), founder and director of the ministry to children with cancer resulting from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Richard Kendall also gave a brief presentation on the Christian foundations of our nation and the Constitution. A short discussion on the topic followed.

On Sunday, November 1, we warmly welcomed His Grace, Bishop NIKON and Chancellor Father John Kreta. Father Kreta concelebrated the Divine Liturgy. During the Liturgy, His Grace, Bishop NIKON gave George Wilkinson III and Kevin Pimpinelli Jr. the blessing to serve as readers. Kevin, at 10 years of age, is one of the youngest. His Grace blessed the "Healing Station" in the Chapel. Sixteen new Altar Server robes donated by

Anna Johnson, were also blessed. The youths carried icons in the procession. Chad McNeil, along with his wife Diane and daughter Erica

Three Saints to 5



St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre Church, Clinton CT

Vinny Melesko



St. Alexis celebrated another first in its fifteen year history by the sending of our first seminarian, Andrew Boyd, to St. Vladimir's Seminary. Andrew has been an active member of the parish community from its origins as a mission in 1994. On Sunday, August 23rd, Andrew received a scholarship of \$2,475, combining funds from the parish and the John and

Mary Sivulka Charitable Trust Fund. His parents are Raymond and Christine Boyd.

The faithful of St. Alexis Church offered stewardship in preparing gyro sandwiches for those attending Education Day at St. Vladimir's Seminary, and participated in the theme of "God's Green Earth." Besides Father Steven, those that helped out this year were John and Joan Skrobat, Vic and Gail Kuziak, Alex and Luba Martins, Susan Egan and Glenn Penkoffidbeck who brought a display in order to talk about bee keeping.

Deacon Steven Hosking has been assigned to St. Alexis. We welcome him and his wife Anne and two sons, Luke and Aaron.

St. Alexis to 6

Reflections from the Assembly from 1

“In our Diocese, the data is quite clear: we continue to slowly lose members. To date, we have lost more than 40% of our membership in the past two decades.... It is absolutely clear that now is the time for every member of the

Diocese to pray earnestly and ask God to guide us in discerning new ways to minister the Gospel. To put it bluntly, if we keep doing exactly what we have been doing, we can only expect more decline.”

This fact and the difficulties of the national church I think were the underlying concerns that formed the basis of the two major presentations on Friday afternoon and in some way were part of the keynote address that Archimandrite Meletios Webber gave right after Bishop NIKON’s report Friday morning. The church is trying to direct its energies away from the wranglings of the past few years and trying to find its role in the confusions of our country.

In his address, Fr. Webber’s approach was a more “spiritual” one, on prayer life, its role and importance. He talked first of the importance of scripture in the church and then about types of prayer, and of prayer as walking with God, as Adam and Eve did in Eden. At one point he seemed to say that it was the only important thing — that much of what we are preoccupied with (even in diocesan meetings), we will find are transient and unimportant. We are to place ourselves before God and to rely on Him.

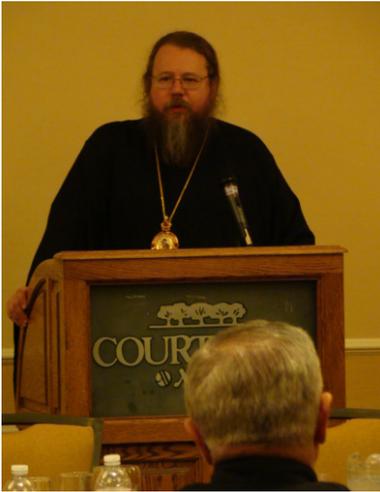
In stark contrast to Fr. Webber’s talk in the afternoon we had two presentations from two different groups, a presentation by Fr. Robert Arida & Dn. John Zarras about the Strategic Planning Committee of the Metropolitan Council and one by Fr. Steven Voytovich, who offered a presentation on Visitation Ministry representing a collaborative effort of the OCA Departments of Institutional Chaplaincy, of which he is the director, and the Department of Christian Service and Humanitarian Aid (CSHA), led by Donna Karabin. Both presentations were ideas for new organizational structures and procedures to ascertain what is needed to find a renewed sense of direction for the OCA and to energize the church into greater effort after the confusion of the last

few years. The area was different, mission work within parishes, but the basic desire seemed to be the same, to renew parishes in more and effective mission work.

Many of the participants thought the Strategic Planning Committee’s direction (not their motives and desires) in particular misguided. It seemed a case of the cart driving the horse. If you just can get the right system, you will get the results you want. Unfortunately, systems do not inspire; they only organize what exists, improve efficiency, and help achieve goals with clear parameters. Systems do not lead people to love God; if used judiciously they help people act out their love of God more effectively. Individuals whose lives are fired up by the Gospel lead others to be fired up. Mother Theresa’s and C.S. Lewis’s lives do that, not committee meetings. Fr. Webber’s was an example of that kind of presence, and in that way in stark contrast to the presentations.

The rest of the Assembly dealt with more practical issues. On Friday afternoon, the lay delegates and the priests met separated into two different groups. At the lay delegates gathering it rapidly became clear that no plans had been made as to who was to chair the meeting or even what we were to discuss. Some of the delegates took it upon themselves to lead a discussion about each of the two presentations. It turned out to be a fruitful meeting with some comparison of mission work in the various diocese, as well as some heated discussion of the Strategic Planning Committee’s presentation. I then made a brief summary of our discussion to the whole assembly on Saturday morning. Our recommendation to the Assembly was that this gathering of lay delegates be continued but with a little more guidance and planning. It enabled us to both find out about each other and to present a voice to the clergy.

As a new member of the Assembly, I was impressed by how open members were to opposing ideas, to the seriousness with which discussions were conducted and at the ease with which one can become involved in the governing life of the church. In a world where one does not usually have a voice, it was invigorating to be at governing body that would listen and hear.



His Beatitude, Metropolitan JONAH addressed the Assembly Banquet. He reflected on the fruitful activity of the Church of Georgia, from which he had just returned, and the need for bold action to serve our own communities and proclaim the fullness of the Gospel in our own culture.

Photo: Rev. David Koles.

Three Saints from 3



Above: Remains of burned apartments after the Basset Street, Ansonia, fire.

Right: Fr. Michael Roshak leading prayers over gifts for local hospitals.

Photos: Alexandra Mastej

prepared a delicious prime rib dinner for approximately 60 persons.

On November 10, a fire in our neighborhood destroyed four apartments in which eight adults and one child lived. Thankfully all escaped without harm. Once again our parishioners came to the aid of these victims. We donat-

ed food, lap robes and monetary assistance.

On November 13 & 14, we held our annual Food & Craft Fair. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped to make this a very successful event.

On Sunday, November 15, the start of Advent, a Holiday Gift-Giving Tree of Hope was set up in the Auditorium. The purpose of tree was to help 32 less-fortunate children within our parish and the community to have a joyful Christmas. Cards with the age and sex of each child were hung on the tree. Within one week of announcing this project, all 32 cards placed on the tree were taken. Wrapped gifts were placed under the tree by December 13. Father Michael delivered the gifts to the appropriate child in time for a joyous holiday, under the auspices of the Benevolent Fund and with great respect for the recipients' privacy.

From Sunday, November 15, through Sunday, December 20,

donations of turkeys, ham, holiday food and fixings were collected to help our less fortunate families. The generosity and outpouring of love from our parishioners was overwhelming. It was a true blessing to help many families in our parish have an enjoyable dinner during the holidays. Special thanks go to Julia Jimenez, who contacted her friends in Girl Scout Troop 37476 in Stratford. The girls decided to sponsor two families. The seven girls, along with their Scout Leader and Mary Jimenez (mother of Julia) shopped for all the items and on Saturday, November 21, they delivered the groceries to Father Michael. The girls visited with Father Michael, who took them into the church and spent half an hour discussing our congregation.

On December 1, Father Michael blessed lap robes and shawls, which were given to Reverend Jo Clair Wilson, the chaplain in charge of the Pastoral Care Office at Griffin Hospital and the Griffin Cancer Center. We were delighted to learn that not only are they distributed by and at Griffin Hospital and the new Cancer Center, but also distributed to the children in the burn unit at Bridgeport Hospital.



Holiness from 2

the teachings of Christ in words and actions. Those words speak of the truth of God and those actions of love and forgiveness, of caring and compassion. That is the Christmas gift we can offer all those with whom we have contact—in our homes, in our schools, at our workplaces, in chance encounters, in communities and throughout the world.

And this year when we hear so much from the secularized world, let us resolve to be different and to infuse that world again with the holy. May every festive light remind us of His light; every twist of garland, remind us of His seamless robe; every snowflake of His gentle coming; and every tree of His saving acts upon the Cross.

May we have a joyful Nativity.

Fr. William DuBovik is the pastor of All Saints Church in Hartford, CT.

Holy Trinity Church, New Britain CT

Arlene Potter



Above: Tag Sale & Food Festival volunteers.
Right: Newly-baptized Zachary Truhan, with his family and Fr. David Koles.
Photos: Nelson Potter

Tag Sale and Food Festival: On Saturday, October 17th, an ambitious group of parishioners from Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in New Britain held a very successful Tag Sale & Food Festival.

The delight of those who attended this event was evident by their smiles of satisfaction as they sampled hot dogs, sauerkraut, homemade soups, pirogi, breads, empadas, stuffed cabbage and pulled-pork sandwiches. The talents of Ed and Marion Bichun, along with assistance from Eva Zagorska, would make the Iron Chef or even Rachel Ray take a back seat to their phenomenal cooking skills.

The Tag Sale was promoted through the untiring efforts of Diane Dounouk and Ann and Mark Myszka, with assistance from Jennie Everson and Margaret Wagner. They organized the many offerings given generously by our church members. The displays were very professional and the flow of sales went smoothly thanks to a lot of planning and preparation.

As you left the Festival, a Bake Sale enticed you to bring home even more goodies!

There were many church members who stepped up and helped with a happy heart in all areas. Although we cannot mention them all, the festival would not have been as great a success without each person's efforts and talents. Many thanks to the wonderful parishioners of our church, and to those who could not be there — we'll see you next time!

Joyous Hearts!

With joyous hearts, the parishioners of Holy Trinity Church welcomed its newest

member: Zachary Truhan, the son of Michael Truhan and grandson of Margaret Wagner.

He was baptized on Saturday, October 14th in an awe-inspiring service under the guidance and love of Father David Koles. God grant you many years!



St. Alexis from 3

Under the direction of Luba Martins, St. Alexis has hosted the Clinton soup kitchen bi-monthly. In these tough economic times, the number of people attending the soup kitchen has gone from an average of 30 to well over 100.

St. Alexis has started up their book club. After many parishioners read and discussed *The Shack* together, the book club began. The books they have read and discussed thus far are *My Sister's Keeper*, *The Pearl of Great Price*, and *Lynette's Hope*.

FOCUS North America from 1

cover startup operational expenses for three years, so that every additional dollar donated maximizes their service to the poor. The IRS has granted the organization tax-exempt status as a charity, after only seven days of review. On June 25, 2009, the Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) chose to wait before granting FOCUS North America the status of an officially endorsed Orthodox agency, but did unanimously pass a resolution stating: "SCOBA gives FOCUS North America a warm endorsement for this welcomed initiative." On Thomas Sunday, April 26, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah issued an appeal on behalf of this organization: "While many of us live in relative comfort, many in our country and even some in our parishes are facing

desperation. One in fifty children in the US are homeless, evicted families are living in tents, millions are jobless, and even more feel hopeless. It is for this reason that I appeal to you to support a new ministry called FOCUS North America." This statement was also published in the Spring/Summer 2009 issue of *The Orthodox Church*. Its leadership also has a strong track record. The chairman, Charles Ajalat is co-founder of International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) and instrumental in the founding of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC). The executive director, Fr. Justin Mathews, was in the past an executive with the Nashville Union Rescue Mission, which had 10,000 volunteers serving 1,000 homeless at any given time. The Antiochian Archdiocese of North America entrusted its six-year-old Orthodox Youth Outreach (OYO) program to FOCUS North America, which renamed it YES, Youth Equipped to Serve. Katrina Bitar, the YES Program Director, herself was transformed as a participant in OYO six years ago.

FOCUS North America describes itself as "an Orthodox domestic social action agency formed to serve the poor and needy on behalf of the Church in North America, to support existing Orthodox ministries doing so effectively, and to help welcoming parishes initiate new social action ministries in their own communities." According to its vision statement, it aims to "• Serve those in need, by providing aid through our programs and partners, • Support Orthodox Christian social action ministries, agencies, professionals, and volunteers; and • Supply parishes and others with the education, resources and training needed to initiate social action ministries in their own communities." Its name, "Fellowship of Orthodox Christians United to Serve," speaks of a vision to mobilize and provide opportunities for Christians to serve those in need, treating them as "living icons," of Christ Himself. The acronym "FOCUS" is also rendered as the areas of activity for this ministry: Food, Occupation, Clothing, Understanding, and Shelter.



Above: Fr. Justin Mathews, Executive Director of FOCUS North America. **Right: Reconciliation Services—FOCUS Kansas City** provides a range of services. *Photos: Footage from FOCUS North America videos.*



FOCUS North America's vision is founded upon the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?'"

And the King will answer and say to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matt. 25:34–40).

Executive Director Fr. Justin Mathews explains the unique purpose of FOCUS North America first by identifying what it does not do: “Our board made a firm decision not to engage in emergency disaster relief, but rather to focus on the persistent and pervasive needs of the poor here at home. It is one answer to the question, where are the Orthodox homeless shelters, the sustained ministries to the poor? Some already exist, but so much more needs to be done. Our approach makes us distinct from the Salvation Army and rescue missions. Just supporting or volunteering at other [Protestant or Roman Catholic] Christian or secular charities does not form us in the whole Orthodox tradition of charity and social action.” The emphasis is on promoting hands-on ministry by volunteers, especially families, in Orthodox ministries in North America. “Our aim is to equip the faithful to be witness-

es in their own community as the Church in ministry to the poor,” Fr. Justin says.

Fr. Justin is tireless in seeking new opportunities to put this aim into reality. Before the interview properly began, he was already inquiring about the possibility of working with local Orthodox churches and the Diocese of New England to establish a “FOCUS center” in our region through which volunteers from parishes could minister to those in need. Later, he returned to the idea of these centers, pointing to FOCUS Kansas City as the model. Reconciliation Services in Kansas City, which offers a wide range of assistance and counseling to local families, came under the FOCUS umbrella this year. One of its outreach efforts is to provide Thanksgiving turkeys and other items to help 72 needy families celebrate the holiday each year. As related at the FOCUS North America website, local contributions ran seriously short this past Thanksgiving: only 24 turkeys. Mother Nicole, Emergency Service Director for Reconciliation Services–FOCUS Kansas City said, “If FOCUS North America hadn’t stepped in and purchased the other needed turkeys, I would have had to call the people signed up for assistance and tell them that I couldn’t help them. What a sad day that would have been.” Instead FOCUS Kansas City was able to provide Thanksgiving meals to 72 families — 218 people.

FOCUS to 9



Above: Students participating in YES (Youth Equipped to Serve) Phoenix, Arizona, mission trip, Nov. 13–15, 2009.

The Nicene Creed for Young People Reviewed by Susan Papademetris

The Nicene Creed for Young People (with Study Guide)
Anthony Coniaris
Light & Life
<light-n-life.com>

Explaining the Nicene Creed to a young person may seem like a daunting task, yet all of us desire that our children understand the meaning of this central declaration of the Orthodox faith. To the rescue comes this very accessible book by Anthony Coniaris.

It divides the Creed into 42 phrases; each phrase of the creed has between a paragraph and a page of explanation, at a level geared to upper elementary students and above. Coniaris explains each phrase in down-to-earth language, usually citing the scriptures and the Church Fathers (and sometimes other Christian thinkers like C.S. Lewis and Dostoevsky).

In places, he contrasts Orthodox belief with that of other faiths. In others, he offers youth-friendly analogies. In the back, there are 42 lesson plans (corresponding to each of the 42 phrases) which consist in 3–9 suggested discussion questions each.

This book and its study guide could easily be used at the dinner table or at a family devotional time for 15–20 minute lessons or conversations. It could also be a very useful resource for parents who are themselves new to Orthodoxy and want to have material on hand that offers quick, straightforward summaries of the beliefs of the Orthodox Church.

But the FOCUS center model offers more than just a meal; their goal is to identify obstacles preventing families from thriving. A major concern is job training and job application assistance. “It’s in our name: ‘Occupation,’” says Fr. Justin, referring to the alternative meaning of FOCUS: “Food, Occupation, Clothing, Understanding, and Shelter.” For example, FOCUS is arranging for donations of business clothes, which then can be earned by job-seekers through persistent participation in the job training and application process. Fr. Justin is recruiting dentists willing to offer a similar service in cosmetic dentistry: “Someone may be skilled and dedicated, a wonderful person, but an employer may only see that she is missing her front teeth. What might be vanity for us is a matter of getting a job or not for one of these people.”

The ambition of FOCUS North America is to establish these centers in ten different locales in the next five years. Already they are recruiting a director for FOCUS Twin Cities, Minnesota, where local churches have offered facilities and FOCUS has organized the start-up funding. Discussions are underway in other locations. Fr. Justin adds: “We would love to work with the churches of New England to establish a center, and where we don’t yet have a center, we intend to establish a volunteer corps to put Matthew 25 into more widespread practice. We want to empower people who want to serve.” Charles Ajalat, chairman of FOCUS North America, writes in an article for the Word Magazine: “Imagine the witness—internally and externally—of 50 city programs. Each with 200 monthly volunteers. Add them together and you get 10,000 volunteers per month nationwide.” At each center, there will be a professional FOCUS North America director to handle administration and support for all those volunteers, in coordination with a local advisory council. Fr. Justin explains, “It’s so a pastor can say to the parish, ‘It’s not something we have to do just by ourselves. Here is a way for us to love God and love our neighbor,

and FOCUS is offering a means for us to accomplish more together than we can apart.”

The crucial point in every aspect of FOCUS North America’s activity is getting Christians to interact with the poor as human beings worthy of our respect and understanding (another of the key words in “FOCUS”). Fr. Justin has a story of how his own life was changed at the Nashville Union Rescue Mission when he met Nathaniel Miles. “This guy, 68 or so, had lived a very hard life in Alabama. Illiterate, lost his three kids when his wife ran off. He thought then that his life was meaningless. He lost everything in the divorce — no home, no car, no money. He met some guys at the train station, and he went with them and lived for years as a

hobo basically. Years later he fell off the train beside the ministry where I was working then, and he went through the recovery program there. Two years later, he had learned to read, got a job, was reading the Bible to people in the position he had been in two years before. If we hadn’t been by the train tracks that day, he would be dead by now. And now he’s been clothed, fed,

FOCUS centers allow pastors to say to their parishes, “Here is a way for us to love God and love our neighbor.”

and now is giving his life back to serve others in the Lord’s name.” Seeing firsthand the transforming love of God is what led to Fr. Justin’s going to seminary and to his work with FOCUS North America today, where the goal is to bring that same firsthand experience of the love of God at work to other Orthodox Christians.

That experience is the essence of YES, Youth Equipped to Serve, another key program of FOCUS North America. Previously known as Orthodox Youth Outreach, its name was changed to encourage non-Orthodox who have wanted to participate alongside Orthodox Christians, according to Fr. Justin. YES describes its purpose as providing “opportunities for junior high and high school students to participate in formative weekends of service, with the ultimate purpose being to raise up a generation of Orthodox Christians who lead others in living out the true mission of the church — to love and serve our most needy neighbors.” The students

To learn more:
Visit the **FOCUS North America website** and the dedicated site of **YES North America**, to find articles, blogs, podcasts and videos:
<<http://www.focusnorthamerica.org>>
<<http://www.yesnorthamerica.org>>

Watch the brand **new YES video**:
<<http://www.yesnorthamerica.org/videos/yes/oyo-videos>>

Invite a member of the FOCUS North America staff to address a parish or other audience:
<parishvisit@FOCUSna.org>

Read an **interview with Fr. Justin Mathews** originally published in Handmaiden Magazine, found at the FOCUS North America website under News: Articles:
<<http://www.focusnorthamerica.org/articles/handmaiden-magazine-an-interview-with-father-justin-mathews>>

Fr. Justin Mathews also highly recommends the newly-published ***On Social Justice — St. Basil the Great***, SVS Press Popular Patristics Series, vol. 38. Introduction & translation by C. Paul Schroeder. (**Cover pictured right.**)

are first brought through a discussion of the nature of poverty and the call to put the needs of others before our own. Within the course of that same weekend, they are engaged in service projects that steadily increase the demands on the youth, within a context of support and reflection meant to encourage spiritual transformation. Participants in two of these weekend learning and service trips are invited to take on a week of leadership training and then are entrusted with responsibility on weekend trips and encouraged to show leadership in their own communities.

Katrina Bitar, YES Program Director, wrote in early December that they would be sponsoring one of these weekend trips in Worcester, Massachusetts on Saturday, Dec. 12. She wrote in answer to an inquiry for this article that the event would be “hosted by St. George Cathedral in Worcester. We will spend a couple hours briefing at the church Saturday morning, followed by partnering with Friendly House, Inc., serving children of working poor and homeless families.

Friendly House was founded ‘for the educational, social and family betterment of residents of the City of Worcester.’ Friendly House/Settlement house works with entire families both nuclear and extended, as an integrating force for the families and the neighborhoods it serves. Friendly House provides a continuum of comprehensive coordinated neighborhood basic services to inner-city families.” Future trips that have already been scheduled for 2010 include YES Jacksonville (January 22–24), YES Los Angeles (February 5–7), YES Cleveland (February 19–21), and YES Oklahoma City (March 5–7).

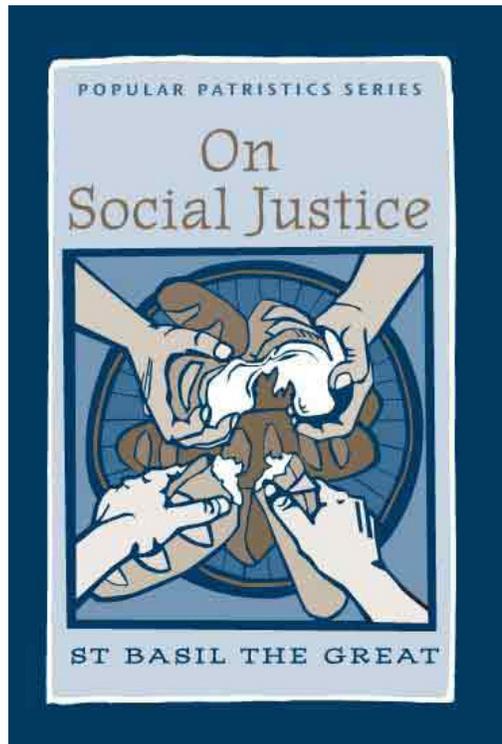
Fr. Justin summed up the vision of FOCUS North America with a parable: “Imagine a

church that is fallen into ruin, neglected. And then the priest and faithful come and restore it. They repair the cracking icons; they dust and clean. Then they can begin to worship in that restored church. Many broken lives are the same way. They are temples of the Holy Spirit, living icons in desperate need of restoration. We must confront the lie that some people are just irredeemable. No one is beyond hope. God’s grace can transform lives if we have the humility to make ourselves available and let God do the rest.”

FOCUS North America has an ambitious vision, and it has already taken some bold steps to help make Orthodoxy in America known for its social outreach as much as for its faithful worship. If you would like to contribute, FOCUS North America first asks for your prayers for the poor and the suffering, and for the ministry of FOCUS North America and its partners. Volunteers are welcome to contact FOCUS North America to join an existing ministry or work together to establish a

new one — see “Get Involved” at their website. Donations can be made online at the FOCUS North America website (see sidebar), or by mail to 3101 Troost Ave., Kansas City, MO 64109.

Fr. Justin Mathews will be the keynote speaker at next year’s Fellowship of Orthodox Churches in Connecticut benefit dinner in Bridgeport, on Sunday, Oct. 3. He says he is “looking forward to the opportunity to speak directly to faithful of New England.” He added as a last word that he and the staff of FOCUS North America are eager to meet with parishes and clergy conferences to explain more about the organization, and especially to lead retreats on outreach to the needy.



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Upcoming Events

- Jan. 15** Deadline to submit articles for the next issue of the ONE Newsletter
- Jan. 30** Annual Father Alexander Schmemmann Memorial Lecture at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary. The Most Rev. Rowan Williams, archbishop of Canterbury and senior bishop of the worldwide Anglican communion, will speak on the topic "Theology and the Contemplative Calling: The Image of Humility in the *Philokalia*."